

Agriculture as a Guarantor for Peace

(Translation from „Ländlicher Raum“ 04/2017, pp. 25-27)



The chairman of the PeaceBread Association Adalbert Kienle talks about the connection between peace and agriculture, the necessary remembrance of the vital role of rural businesses in times of transformation as well as the development of an international network in Central and Eastern Europe.

What is the idea behind the PeaceBread initiative?

„Agriculture needs Peace - Peace causes Remembrance - Remembrance creates Values “. That is the introduction to our website. When I talk to young people I often show a pencil sketch from the front of the First World War. There is a plow on a field, it is not tied to a horse. The plow is „the lonely one“. That is handwritten on the drawing. It symbolizes the dramatic change from a normal field to a battle field, it symbolizes the whole madness of war. We wanted to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain and started an European initiative „Peace and Agriculture“ and founded the PeaceBread Association. We are convinced that it is possible to discuss the importance of peace and the role of agriculture for the unity of Europe on the basis of the values that Europe itself represents. It is about facts and emotion.

The statement that without peace agriculture will be impossible or only possible with limits, seems trivial. Why do you emphasize this connection?

Yes, very trivial indeed. And then on the other hand we have a very peaceless world, people are suffering, starving and dying in many regions of the world. If you are lucky enough to live in the „triviality“ of peace and having your hunger satisfied, should this be just a matter of fact?

What role plays Agriculture for the preservation or creation of peace?

Food security is – this is shown by a look into history or the world today – an essential condition for the preservation and creation of peace. When we prepared the first European PeaceBread conference with the participation of politics and the civil society, colleagues from one of the twelve partner countries introduced this experience: „Farmers and rural entrepreneurs have in many cases shown their pragmatic and peaceful attitude during hard times and serve as an important basis for the national and European identity and peace.“ We should not only forget this positive role of farmers and rural entrepreneurs during the difficult times of transformation, but communicate this to the following generations. Agriculture as the breadwinner of the people, the backbone of the rural areas and now even as a guarantor for peace.

Are you not over-straining the agricultural sector and the requirements that it has to meet with this?

Agriculture is a significant guarantor for peace in its role as a breadwinner and backbone of the rural areas. This is an independent fact apart from the PeaceBread Association. Our association can help to make these connections aware to the agricultural sector. This is also very important for young people. It does not suffice to only keep ones farm in order. The farm itself is situated in a society which has to be actively shaped.

Are you pursuing, at least indirectly, a certain agricultural policy like the securing of state-funded support for agriculture or a certain alignment of agriculture?

The PeaceBread Association is independent from politics or religious denomination. Its network is open to the most diverse facets of the European agricultural sector. Important for us are the following messages: 1. Peace and understanding between nations are the keys to a successful and sustainable agriculture. 2. Sustainable agriculture provides peace and secures the understanding between nations. 3. Sustainable agriculture is not only economically efficient but ecological and social friendly, it treats the natural resources with care and allows economizing for future generations. 4. A sustainable European agriculture bears responsibility for feeding the world’s population. We encountered great interest at every talk or meeting that we organised with the PeaceBread Association or have been part of.

Which civil society organisations are working with your initiative?

We are eager to find a civil society partner in each of our partner countries for the international network “Peace and Agriculture”. Good examples for this are:

- the Association „PeaceBread Hungary“ in Szarvas, Hungary

- the „Estonian Rye Association“ in Tallin, Estonia
- the Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre in Ozolnieki, Latvia
- the „Priest Jerzy Popiełuszko“ high school and the municipal administration of Suchowola, Poland.

In other countries there is support from the ministries for agriculture for the founding of civil society structures. A recent example for such an initiative is the Slovakian Museum for Nature Preservation and Speleology and the Hotel Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš as well as the Institute for Plant Production in Piešťany, Slovakia.

A part of the PeaceBread partner countries is ruled by nationally oriented and autocratic parties. How do you assess being misused for political purposes?

We act based on the principle „Better to talk with each other than about each other“. We fared well with this. The policy that applies to us as well as to everyone else is that through encounters and discussions we can learn from each other. All our partners are unified through the former division of Europe, to overcome that shared experience and to work together in the EU. We would like the EU to emerge stronger from all those current discussions and we want to contribute to that. We also try to discuss day-to-day politics in this bigger context. It makes sense to pursue the topics of the connections of democracy, freedom and peace, we feel vindicated by the feedback we get from the network and at the conferences for this.

What are the substantial achievements of the associations of all the previous activities?

Without a doubt the founding and the stabilisation of our international network „Peace and Agriculture“ with partners in twelve countries. In 2014 we organised a launch conference in Berlin. Our experienced managing director who is also highly esteemed by our partner countries Dr. Giebried Schenk was and still is a highly requested contact at the following conferences: 2015 in Poznan, Polen, then 2016 in Szarvas, Ungarn, most recently 2017 in Varna, Bulgaria. Right now preparations for 2018 are underway for a joint conference in Estonia and Lithuania as well as in Latvia in 2019. If that is not a confirmation for trust and a joint interest for encounter and exchange. We are thankful and proud, that we have experienced this much sympathy and support, although we are an association with a relatively small account of actors. This starts – since the founding of PeaceBread - with the patronage of the Federal Minister for Food and Agriculture. Repeatedly federal ministers and state secretaries have been involved in our PeaceBread events. Especially the PeaceBread events about the German-German history with regard to agriculture and the

rural areas have been drawing a lot of attention.

Are you surprised by this?

No, that does not surprise us. It proves that it is urgent to have a historical reflection of the role of agriculture and the rural areas in the post-reunification period. Recently this years FORUM PeaceBread in Berlin with the topic „Grinded Places and the Green Belt - The purpose of the former border as a reminder“ with the artists Anne Heinlein and Göran Gnaudschun as well as the state secretary Dr. Hermann Onko Aeikens from the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture drew a lot of attention and resonance. With the FORUM we have created a format in which we can present our association, its network and its partners in Berlin.

What are the PeaceBread plans for the coming years?

They will be about the expanding of the network, the PeaceBread activities together with the civil society and politics. We are grateful - otherwise our work would not be possible – that we are entwined with the agricultural network and are getting support on a federal and state level. Our members and supporters are presented transparently on our website. Our youngest supporting members are two rural adult education centres and the Federation of German Land Youth.

- Rainer Münch

Adalbert Kienle was the deputy general secretary of the German Farmers' Association from the middle of 1991 until his retirement in the autumn of 2011. From 1993 until 2015 he was a member of the European Economic and Social Committee.

In 2015 he became the chairman of the PeaceBread Association. The association first started in 2014 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall with an European congress and the baking of the PeaceBread. The rye for this bread comes from a field in the middle of the former Death Strip close to the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Street. Since then eleven Eastern European countries have started a rye field near a historical site. The rye is used every year for symbolic baking of a PeaceBread. One of these rye fields for example is situated in the polish community of Suchowola, the birth place of the beatified priest Jerzy Popieluszko who was murdered by the former polish security agency.